

VZCZCXRO2312
PP RUEHLN RUEHSK RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHEK #0063/01 0221004
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 221004Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1677
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2810
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0089
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3205
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2591
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000063

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND SCA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZSTAN: AMBASSADOR ADVOCATES FOR RFE/RL WITH STATE TV
DIRECTOR

BISHKEK 00000063 001.2 OF 002

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On January 21, Ambassador Gfoeller met with KTR Director Melis Eshimkanov to advocate for RFE/RL and to discuss the stalemate in negotiations to get RFE/RL's Kyrgyz service, Azattyk, back on the air. While Eshimkanov reiterated complaints about the content of Azattyk programming, he indicated that he was still open to negotiations with RFE/RL. He suggested ways in which the Embassy could lobby for RFE/RL programming. End Summary.

ESHIMKANOV AIRS COMPLAINTS

¶2. (SBU) Eshimkanov was cordial toward the Ambassador but indicated that he would like a written apology from IBB contracting officer Chere Lynn Peters for her December 11 letter to him, which he found offensive. He said he was also unhappy about RFE/RL's public comments accusing him of censorship, which he denies.

¶3. (SBU) Eshimkanov said that he recently reported to RFE/RL in Prague three Azattyk broadcasts that he found offensive and unethical. He said that under Kyrgyz law, KTR still has legal responsibility for the content of RFE/RL programming and he requested RFE/RL to find a way to take responsibility under Kyrgyz law. He also said that he had requested RFE/RL Prague to fire Azattyk Director Kubat Otorbaev because he believes Otorbaev lacks the judgment to produce balanced content.

¶4. (SBU) One of Eshimkanov's complaints involved a "violation of journalist ethics" that allegedly took place in the KTR studio where Azattyk films its youth-oriented program "Azattyk Plus." Eshimkanov said that while filming, Azattyk shut off the lights, lit candles, and said on the air, "We don't have electricity in Kyrgyzstan. There is no electricity at KTR." He cited other examples of broadcasts he found offensive, including, for example, when opposition leaders say controversial things on Azattyk about government officials. He said, "Maybe this is allowed in the United States, but this is not public television. The President gets very upset when they say bad things about him on his own channel."

15. (SBU) Ambassador Gfoeller advocated forcefully for RFE/RL and reminded Eshimkanov that the Kyrgyz Republic has historically distinguished itself from neighboring countries as having the "freest press in Central Asia." She said that the problems between KTR and RFE/RL threaten to tarnish the image of the Kyrgyz Republic as a bastion of free expression. Eshimkanov agreed and said he did not think that a Karimov-type regime is suited to the Kyrgyz people.

ESHIMKANOV'S SUGGESTIONS

16. (SBU) Eshimkanov indicated that he would be more comfortable signing an agreement if the Ambassador wins the support of President Bakiyev. Eshimkanov indicated that the President's new Chief-of-Staff, Daniyar Usenov, may be more supportive of Azattyk than the old Chief-of-Staff, Medet Sadyrkulov. Eshimkanov also suggested that the Ambassador meet with Oksana Malevannaya, the new Chief of the Secretariat under the President (responsible for the Protocol and Press Service).

NEXT STEPS

17. (SBU) Post recommends that IBB contracting officer Cherelynn Peters write an apology letter to Eshimkanov. Ambassador Gfoeller will request a meeting with President Bakiyev, and will meet with the new Chief of the Secretariat under the President. Post, RFE/RL, and IBB will brainstorm ways to reassure KTR about the content of Azattyk. Some preliminary ideas include studying the Kyrgyz Law on TV and Radio Broadcasting to find a way to relieve KTR of legal responsibility for content and providing stronger guarantees to KTR on content (such as stronger language in the contract giving IBB

BISHKEK 00000063 002.2 OF 002

responsibility for content or on-air disclaimers).

GFOELLER